

## **DETROIT: KILLER TO GET LIFE IN PRISON FOR RAMPAGE AT CHELI'S - JURY CONVICTS FIRED TEEN OF MURDER IN 2 STABBING DEATHS**

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**Justin** Blackshear is going to prison for life for killing two of his former bosses at Cheli's Chili Bar in Detroit.

After a jury found him guilty Wednesday, Blackshear's grandfather wondered whether the 18-year-old understands what he did.

"In a way I don't think he really knows what he did," said 61-year-old Greg Hayes of Detroit. "I'm sorry that all of this happened. My grandson needs help more than anything."

Wayne County jurors took just under two hours to convict Blackshear of two counts of premeditated first-degree murder for the Jan. 2 slayings of Mark Barnard, 52, and Megan Soroka, 49.

Blackshear, who was 17 at the time, had been fired from jobs as a busboy and dishwasher at the popular downtown restaurant owned by Red Wings defenseman Chris Chelios. Blackshear's name also appears as **Blackshere** in some court documents.

Blackshear stabbed Barnard 28 times with a kitchen knife before stabbing Soroka 14 times on the second floor of the multilevel restaurant.

Barnard, who lived in Detroit, worked as a supervisory chef at the restaurant. Soroka, from Dearborn, was a manager.

Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Lisa Lindsey argued that the evidence against Blackshear was overwhelming. She said that Blackshear, who had been fired for the second time in November, went to the restaurant just before 9 a.m. with the intent to kill and rob.

She pointed out that he confessed to the stabbings, that police found more than \$7,000 in cash stolen from the restaurant at his Detroit residence, and that DNA evidence of blood samples taken from his jeans and an envelope in his apartment matched the victims' blood.

Additionally, seven witnesses, including Chelios, identified Blackshear as the hooded person on surveillance videos from the restaurant on Adams Street on the morning of the killings.

Blackshear's attorney Earl Washington asked jurors to consider second-degree murder if they thought he was guilty. He argued that the stabbings could not have been planned because the killer did not bring a weapon to the restaurant.

But Lindsey, who prosecuted the case with Assistant Prosecutor Pat Muscat, pointed out that two witnesses testified that Blackshear called them in December, looking for a gun.

"I guess I'm not completely surprised," Washington said of the verdict. "We didn't have a lot to work with. I'm not sure he was surprised either."

Blackshear stared at the courtroom ceiling when jurors read the verdict.

Wayne County Circuit Judge Helen Brown is scheduled to sentence him Sept. 7, a formality because first-degree murder carries a mandatory life prison sentence.

Jurors left the courthouse through a back entrance, and a sheriff's deputy said they decided not to talk to the media.

Family members of the victims issued a joint statement thanking prosecutors and police.

"They're obviously happy," Lindsey said. "But they're still very devastated."

Chelios also issued a written statement of thanks.

"I would also like to recognize and thank Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Lisa Lindsey and her staff for their exceptional work," he said. "Due to their diligent efforts this case was solved very quickly, and for that I am extremely grateful."

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo

CAPTION: **Justin** Blackshear of Detroit

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